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ABSTRACT

To investigate the current status of group time in early childhood centers, a small-scale exploratory study was designed and executed. Results of interviews with 35 teachers and observations in five classrooms serving children ages 2 1/2 through kindergarten revealed that all classrooms had at least one group time or circle time, usually in the morning. Of 14 broad categories of resources noted by teachers, books and stories, and music and songs were most frequently mentioned; poetry, nursery rhymes, and relaxation activities were least frequently mentioned. Teachers' written plans and observations revealed the actual use of a much narrower range of activities. Immediate concerns, such as "themes" and children's interests and needs, were primary determinants of what teachers did. Detailed written plans were seldom made. Teachers reported that their major problems involved disturbances of group time by students and balancing the needs of the individual child with those of the group. Teachers ascribed such problems to factors beyond their control; these included children's developmental level, home backgound, and group size. Observation revealed much inattention during group time, with teachers using relatively few techniques for monitoring, maintaining, and guiding children's attention and behavior. Implications for teacher educators, administrators, and teachers are discussed. Teachers are urged to take an active classroom leadership role by: (1) planning more systematically; (2) using group time to introduce new ideas and skills and develop positive attitudes and behavior; (3) expand their repertoire of materials and activities; (4) enlarge their techniques of monitoring and guiding behavior; and (5) coaching other adults in the classroom how to behave during group time. Measures used are appended. (Author/RH)

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Group Time in Early Childhood Centers:

An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Results of interviews with thirty-five (35) teachers and observations in five classrooms serving children age 2-1/2 through kindergarten revealed that all the classrooms had at least one group time or circle time, usually conducted in the morning. Of 14 broad categories of resources mentioned by teachers, books and stories, music and songs were most frequently mentioned; poetry, nursery rhymes, and relaxation activities least frequently mentioned. Plans and observation revealed a much narrower range of activities actually used. The immediate -- "themes" and children's interests and needs were primary determinants of what teachers did. Detailed written plans were the exception. Teachers reported that children's behavior that disturbed group time and balancing the needs of the individual child with those of the group were their major problems (80%). Teachers identified most of these problems as being caused by factors out of their control (children's developmental level, home background, size of group). Observation revealed much inattention during group time, with teachers using relatively few techniques for monitoring, maintaining, and guiding children's attention and behavior. Conclusions were that for many teachers and children, group time is not the enjoyable, rewarding experience it should be; teachers did not perceive

themselves as active and influential leaders in group time events; teachers were underusing resources available for group time and methods of maintaining, monitoring and guiding behavior during group time; concern with the immediate dominated teachers decision-making about group time; group time for different ages of children was very similar. Early childhood educators should address some of the strengths and needs identified in this study so teachers and children can enjoy and learn from group time.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The dramatic expansion of preprimary programs that began in the late 1960s has continued to the present time and is predicted to continue. The social and educational trends that fueled this expansion--equal educational opportunity, urbanization, family mobility, the increase of young mothers in the labor force, the increase in the number of single parent families, and evidence of the importance of children's early years to their later development--are well documented in the professional literature and the popular press. The development of curriculum materials--manipulatives, songs, stories, movement activities, appropriate readiness procedures, and activities to promote children's growth in all developmental areas--lagged behind, but is rapidly catching up. Indeed, it is in danger of overwhelming teachers and classrooms. What appears to be missing in many classrooms is the ability to organize those materials and combine them with the other classroom variables of time, space, and the children and adults involved to achieve a smoothly functioning, purposeful classroom.

There has been little analysis of how teachers plan for and conduct the various activity segments, such as snack time, art, free choice, rest time, outdoor play and

group time, that make up the day in most preprimary schools and centers. An activity segment is an identifiable portion of a day in a school or center (Ross, 1983).

Books on early childhood education usually describe such activities and activity segments, but give teachers little specific guidance on how to plan, organize, and conduct them. A review of the literature revealed little empirical evidence of what teachers and children actually do in these activity segments, and in the transitions into and out of them.

For example, an ERIC/CIJE search identified only seven studies directly and indirectly related to the classroom interactive processes and the activity segment of "group time" (Berkeley and Entwhistle, 1979; Grieger, Kauffman & Grieger, 1976; Hamilton & Gardin 1978; Hawn, Holt, & Holmberg, 1978; Morrison and Oxford, 1978; Raitz, 1979; Tyler, Fay, & Hutt, 1979). The best summary of the literature search and the small number of studies available is a quotation from Berkeley and Entwhistle "Little systematic information is available about what goes on inside young children's classrooms" (1979).

Yet it is the implementation of such activity segments, their management, the flow of one segment into the other, and the interaction among adults and children in the activities, that determines much of the climate

and learning that goes on in a school and center.

One activity segment that teachers must carefully plan and organize is called variously "group time", "circle time", "story time", or "group meeting." It is the time of day when children and teacher come together to sing songs, read and listen to a story, discuss coming or past events, do finger plays and action rhymes, and in many cases engage in the infamous show and tell. Teachers usually have several goals for children in group time, but one of the most important is that children learn to listen and attend to the teacher and other children, learn appropriate behavior in a group meeting, and learn how to learn from group presentations - all important school and life skills.

We know little about what teachers and children actually do in group time; how long they spend together; what types of activities they participate in; how teachers signal the beginning and the end, and prevent or handle behavior problems. Such "ecological" status information is needed to help us learn more about the "texture" of children's and teacher's lives in early childhood centers, and as a starting point for helping teachers retain existing best practices and improve those that need improving.

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

To investigate the current status of group time in early childhood centers, a small scale exploratory study was designed and executed. It consisted of:

1. Interviews with 35 preprimary teachers from four major types of early childhood classrooms and centers, teaching children from ages 2-1/2 through 6 (kindergarten age).

2. Observation of group time in five of those classrooms, with the foci of observation based in part on the interview results.

3. Tabulation and analysis of findings, and drawing of conclusions and recommendations relating to group time in early childhood centers.

4. Follow-up implementation and dissemination of specific recommendations relating to group time, presented to 15 selected teachers from the centers involved. Formative evaluation of these recommendations and other dissemination efforts are not included in this report.

METHOD

Instrumentation

Interviews

A draft interview schedule consisting of both open and closed questions was constructed and pretested on ten early childhood teachers from a wide variety of centers to check for clarity, order of questions, and to see if wording of the questions elicited the desired responses. Suggested revisions were made to develop the final interview schedule (Attachment A).

Observations

A draft observation schedule was constructed and pretested for content, format, and processes expected of the observers. Two revisions were done until a satisfactory instrument and workable processes were obtained (Attachment B).

Data Collection

Interviews

Two interviewers familiar with early childhood education were trained and supervised by the investigator, who also conducted interviews. Weekly meetings were held to assure comparability of interview techniques and results.

Arrangements for personal interviews with centers and teachers were made by telephone, with a brief explanation of the purpose, assurance that all information would be

pooled and unidentifiable, and that the interviews would take approximately 20 to 30 minutes (determined from the pre-test). The same procedure was used for observations. No center or teacher declined to cooperate. In fact, in centers where only one teacher was to be interviewed, the director frequently volunteered all the teachers; other teachers offered to be interviewed; or teachers offered to arrange to have us talk with their assistant or aide. In most cases, interviews took place after school hours, in the center or classroom setting. In spite of this, interviewers found that after the interview was "concluded", many teachers wanted to continue further discussion, either of group time or other aspects of the program. We couldn't get away!

When teachers taught two groups of children, we asked them to select one to tell about: either the morning or afternoon, or the Tuesday/Thursday or Monday/Wednesday/ Friday group.

Results from the closed questions were compiled and analyzed by computer. Because of the small number of interviews (35) codes for the open questions were constructed from all the interview results, rather than a sample. All three interviewers participated in this process, and in the determination of how responses should be coded.

Observations

The investigator and another trained observer simultaneously observed in a sample of five classrooms during the actual group time and the events immediately preceding and following. Context information (floor plan, posted daily plans) was obtained separately.

Interrater reliability was .80. Results reported represent the mean of the findings of the two observers. Comments and narrative observations came from both observers.

Observers arrived early and stayed after the scheduled group time to obtain necessary "before" and "after" information. During group time they observed in one-minute "bursts", alternating between checking for teacher methods of maintaining attention and dealing with inattention (such as scanning the group or reinforcing desired behavior) and determining what activity was going on, and what adults and children were doing (were children disruptive, inattentive, or appropriately attentive?). Thus, each major focus of observation--teacher methods of monitoring children's behavior or adult/child activity--was observed one minute out of every two in group time, with a few seconds at the end of each observation to reset the stop-watch and make sure the observers were synchronized.

The first scan determined the number of teachers, aides, and children present. The second scan, beginning with the teacher and scanning to the right, determined the following items:

1. Activity or Content: Show and tell; activity record; book; roll; song; fingerplay; and so forth.

2. Adult behavior, of teacher and any assistants present according to the following predetermined code: Leads; talks to; reads to; guides child behavior; listens; waits; participates; manipulates material; non-focal activity (interruptions, looking for material, playing with child). Observers were also free to write in other behavior. For example, an assistant would sometimes leave.

3. Child behavior on three items:

a. Overt disruption: Stops flow of group time; distracts teacher and other children; interrupts; hits; fights; doesn't conform to rules.

b. Inattention or non-participation: Does not participate when that is called for; looks away from focus of activity; plays with clothing or other objects; talks with other children; rolls on floor, etc.

c. Appropriate attending/participating: Attends to activity focus; if not participating is watching; neither disruptive nor inattentive.

This scan alternated with a scan to check the items listed below:

1. Teacher Methods for Monitoring/Maintaining Attention: Scans group; maintains eye contact with group; focuses on one child or group; focuses on material; focuses on other adults; changes pace and presentation; circulates among group.

2. Teacher Methods of Dealing with Inattention and Misbehavior: Prevents potential problems (seats children; maintains momentum); reminds children of appropriate behavior; tends to problem situations early, in positive fashion; attends to each misbehavior, regardless of seriousness; ignores minor inattention/misbehavior; eliminates disruptive behavior quickly; lets misbehavior disrupt group time; admonishes, scolds, reprimands children; puts off or ignores quiet children.

Data Analysis

The number of observations of actual group time activity in each center varied according to the length of group time, which lasted 13, 16, 22, 25, and 31 minutes respectively, in the five centers. We observed 105 minutes of group time. Five minutes were spent determining numbers of adults and children in group time; 96 minutes were spent in actual observation; eight minutes were spent in the "restart" intervals between observations.

Total number of observations of either of the two points of focus: Teacher methods of dealing with children or group time activity and adult/child behavior was 48.

The two observer checks were averaged to obtain the mean number of times a particular behavior was observed. For example, if one observer noted that a teacher ignored minor inattention or misbehavior five times, and the other observer noted it seven times, six was used as the final count.

Limitations

This investigation is labeled an exploratory study for three reasons:

1. Only a limited number of prior studies have attempted to do in-depth assessment of classroom processes in preschool and of group time in particular. This study explored ways to assess teacher's perception of group time and the actuality of what happens, but made no attempt to set forth a definitive approach.

2. The relatively small sample (35) of preprimary teachers interviewed and observed is limited to the Denver metropolitan area, which may or may not be representative of the nation as a whole. In addition, constraints and obligations of the study, for which Metropolitan State College (MSC) provided released time, dictated inclusion of the three early childhood schools and centers with which

MSC is associated: The MSC Child Development Center, the Auraria Child Care Center, and the Greenlee-Metro Lab School (A Denver Public School). Although these schools provided only a small portion of the total population, their inclusion may have influenced level of teacher education, funding, and other variables.

3. The study investigated only selected variables related to the conduct, processes, and outcomes of group time. For example, subject matter of the stories, songs, and fingerplays was not addressed.

These limitations should be kept in mind in any generalizations based upon the results.

Interview Population

Thirty-five classroom teachers of children age 2-1/2 through kindergarten were interviewed. Teachers of infants and toddlers were excluded. Chronological age of the children ranged from 2.6 through almost seven years, with well over half (58%) the teachers teaching the traditional "preschool" age of three through five. Twenty percent of the teachers taught "mixed age" classrooms. These included children from 2-1/2 through six, and all possible variations in between. (Table 1).

Center Characteristics

Teachers interviewed and observed taught in a wide variety of centers and schools (Table 2). Over half of the teachers were in half-day "preschools". The terms

Table 1

Age Range of Children in Classrooms

Age Range	Frequency	Percent
2-1/2-3	1	2
3 - 4	10	29
4 - 5	10	29
5 - 6	7	20
Mixed	7	20
	35	100%

Table 2

Type of Early Childhood Center

Type	Frequency	Percent
Preschool	18	51
Full-day Child Care	9	26
Kindergarten	6	17
Combination (all day child care with kindergarten and/or preschool	2	6
	35	100%

"nursery school" and "day care" were seldom seen or heard. "Preschools" usually meant half-day programs; "child care centers" or a variety of child development, child motivation, or early learning centers meant full-day child care.

Sponsorship and funding were also varied, reflecting the independent and entrepreneurial nature of much of early childhood care and education (Tables 3 and 4).

Support of over half the centers came from an amazing combination of sources: Fund-raising; parent labor; agency purchase of services for individual children and families; taxes; tuition; and church, hospital, or United Way contributions and subsidies. Those schools supported primarily by tax money were kindergartens and Chapter I (low-income) preschools. Other preschools, even when sponsored by public schools, usually charged tuition and had other sources of revenue.

Teacher Characteristics

The educational requirements to be a teacher in preprimary schools and centers in Colorado vary according to whether centers are regulated by the Colorado Department of Education (public schools) or the Colorado Department of Social Services (all others). Public schools require classroom teachers to have a minimum education of a bachelor's degree. Schools and centers with other sponsorship must have teachers who are "group leader qualified" by

Table 3

Sponsorship of Centers and Schools

Sponsor	Frequency	Percent
Proprietary	10	28
Public School	8	23
Religious Institution	2	6
Community Agency	2	6
Corporation	2	6
Other (Hospital; Cooperative; College; college student activities; independent; combination)	11	31
	35	100%

Table 4

Funding of Centers and Schools

Funding Source	Frequency	Percent
Combination	19	55
Tuition from Parents	11	31
Tax Money (Local, Federal, State or combination)	5	14
	35	100%

the Colorado Department of Social Services. That is, they must have a college degree in any discipline, or specified combinations of child-related training or experience. Child-related training is not required, nor is a college degree.

The teachers in this study far exceeded minimum educational requirements (Table 5). Almost half (44%) had a bachelor's or master's degree in early childhood education, child development, or a related area. Although population characteristics may be skewed because of the inclusion of the three schools associated with MSC, highly educated teachers were found in all types of settings--full-day child care, cooperative preschools, religious institutions, and so on.

All adults in charge of classrooms were called "teachers" regardless of the setting, age of the children, or education of the caregiver.

The teachers interviewed and observed were relatively "young" in teaching experience. Although their experience ranged from less than three months to 22 years, over 50% had taught six years or less (Table 6).

Almost three-fourths of the teachers had only preprimary teaching experience. Of the 11 who had taught at other levels, four had taught only one year; one, two years; and one, three years. Most decided early that

Table 5

Highest Level of Education Completed by Teachers

Education Completed	Frequency	Percent
Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education or a related area (Elementary Ed; Child Development)	12	34
Bachelor's or Master's Degree in another area	9	26
Master's Degree in ECE or related area	4	11
Some College, ECE	4	11
Some College, in another area	3	9
Asscciate's Degree, ECE	2	6
High School	1	3
	35	100%

Table 6

Years of Early Childhood Teaching Experience

Years	Frequency	Percent
0	1	3
1	2	6
2	2	6
3	4	11
4	1	3
5	6	17
6	2	6
7	1	3
9	2	6
10	2	6
11	3	9
12	1	3
13	1	3
15	3	9
16	2	6
21	1	3
22	1	3
	35	103% [a]

[a] Percent sums to more than 100 because of rounding.

they wanted to work with very young children and stayed with that decision.

Classroom Composition

Classroom composition was determined by class size and adult:child ratio. Class size ranged from 10 (a group of three year-olds in a cooperative nursery) to one group of 60 (a team-taught kindergarten with two certified teachers and two aides). Sixty percent (60%) of the classes had fewer than 18 children (Table 7).

Adult to child ratios were well within state and federal suggested guidelines; over two-thirds of the classrooms had an adult to child ratio of one adult for ten or fewer children (Table 8). Clearly, class size and adult:child ratio, two critical variables in classroom composition, indicate that children and teachers in these rooms should be able to create a good place to live and learn.

Observation Population

Five of the 35 teachers interviewed were observed before, during, and after group time. Classrooms were representative of the centers and schools from which the teachers were interviewed, with one each of a cooperative preschool, college-sponsored child development preschool center, all-day child care center (younger children), all-day child care center (older children) public school kindergarten.

Table 7

Class Size of Interview Population

Number of Children	Frequency	Percent
10	6	17
12	4	11
14	3	8
15	2	6
16	2	6
17	2	6
18	2	6
19	1	3
20	2	6
23	1	3
24	1	3
25	1	3
27	1	3
28	3	8
30	3	8
60	1	3
	35	100%

Table 8

Adult:Child Ratio of Interview Population

Ratio	Frequency	Percent
1:5	4	11
1:6	4	11
1:7	3	8
1:8	5	14
1:9	2	6
1:10	16	17
1:11	1	3
1:12	2	6
1:13	0	0
1:14	3	8
1:15	2	6
1:16	0	0
1:17	1	3
1:18	0	0
1:19	1	3
1:20	1	3
	35	99% [a]

[a]Percent does not sum to 100 because of rounding.

RESULTS

Incidence and Name

All the teachers interviewed (35) had at least one time during the day when the teacher and children gathered together. Almost half (17 teachers) had such congregated activities twice a day; a fourth (8 teachers) had them three times a day. When two or more congregated segments took place, one was often a quite short "planning" or "review" session at the beginning or end of the day.

Almost half (49%) called the activity segment "group time" or "group meeting time." "Circle time" was next most frequently used (7 teachers; 20%). Other terms included "opening exercises", "the meeting", music time", "concept time", "story time" and "nothing--it's just a routine."

Time of Day and Length

Teachers interviewed and observed taught morning, afternoon, and all day, so the following information regarding time of day and length reflects those variations, as well as variation in length of group times conducted for varying purposes.

In all day or morning programs, a group time usually occurred sometime between 9:00 and 12:00 a.m. In afternoon or all-day programs, a group time usually occurred either

between 1:00 and 2:00 p.m. or 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. (Table 9). Most all-day programs had both morning and afternoon group times.

Differences in frequency of morning and afternoon group times may reflect the differing structure of the all-day child care programs, differing functions of congregated meetings at various points in the day, or different time utilization by teachers who have afternoon classes. Available information does not make that clear. Given current emphasis upon the relationship of time to people's abilities to attend to a given task, this pattern of placement during the day may bear further investigation.

Fifteen to twenty minutes was the predominant length of group time reported (Table 10), although the range was from 5 to 35 minutes. Early morning and noon time meetings were not only less frequent, they were shorter, evidently focusing upon the arrival/planning and dismissal/review functions of congregated meetings.

Some interesting discrepancies exist between the reported length of group time and the observed length of group time. Of the five centers observed, only one had a group time between 15-20 minutes long--16 minutes. One was shorter--13 minutes; three were longer--22,24, and 31 minutes respectively. During pretesting of the observation schedule, observation of one group time with

Table 9

Time of Day a Group Time Occurred

Time	Frequency[a]	Percent[b]
7 - 8 a.m.	1	3
8 - 9 a.m.	8	23
9 - 10 a.m.	19	54
10 - 11 a.m.	17	49
11 - 12 a.m.	10	29
12 - 1 p.m.	3	9
1 - 2 p.m.	5	14
2 - 3 p.m.	2	6
3 - 4 p.m.	5	14
4 - 5 p.m.	0	0
	70	100%

[a]Teachers could respond more than once.

[b]Percent of 35, the number of teachers who could have had a congreated meeting during that time period.

Table 10

Length of Group Time Related to Time of Day

Time of Day	Length of Group Time	Frequency[a]	Percent[b]
7-8 a.m.	5 minutes	1	100%
8-9 a.m.	15-20 minutes	5	62
9-10 a.m.	15-20 minutes	14	70
10-11 a.m.	15-20 minutes	10	63
11-12 a.m.	15-20 minutes	8	80
12-1 p.m.	5-10 minutes	3	100
1-2 p.m.	15 minutes	5	100
2-3 p.m.	10-20 minutes	2	67
3-4 p.m.	15-20 minutes	3	75

[a]Not all respondents had a group time during that time period. Only the most frequently mentioned time periods are displayed. [b]Percent of those who had a group meeting in that time period.

three and four-year-old children was discontinued at 45 minutes--when observers ran out of the draft coding sheets and the ability to attend. Although clock time is not necessarily a valid indicator of quality, attention, or learning, these data suggest that teachers may underestimate the amount of time they expect children to attend in group meetings.

Advance Planning for Group Time

Twenty of the 35 teachers interviewed reported that they developed written plans for group time; twelve did not; three reported they did written plans "sometimes" or "rarely." Teachers reported several different approaches to planning group time, with incorporation into a weekly overview the most frequent (Table 11).

When teachers reported they did specific planning for group time, we asked if they would share a sample of those plans with us. In some cases, the teachers searched in vain for a sample, or turned to a plan book with nothing written in it. In other cases, detailed weekly plans in a teacher's plan book included detailed plans for group time. A grid on 8-1/2 in. by 11 in. paper with days of the week along one margin and typical preschool activities or developmental areas along the other margin was typical. Teachers wrote the activity they were planning to do in the resulting cells. Of the five plans of this nature

Table 11

Type of Plans for Group Time

Type	Frequency	Percent
Incorporated into weekly overview (one week on one or two pages)	17	36
No plans	12	25
Detailed weekly plans	7	15
Notes on group time for self only	4	9
Select material from resource file	4	9
Other (yearly) monthly overview; individualized planning)	3	6
	47	100%

shared with us, four had a space specifically designated for "group time" or "circle time" plans. One did not. One center had plans for a month on a dittoed one-page calendar.

Where we were able to examine written plans for group time, the most frequently found plan listed the name of the book to be read; song or other music activity (rhythm band); or discussion topic, such as "Our wonderful eyes" (followed by "wonderful ears", "mouth", "smell and touch" on succeeding days).

Teachers explained their approaches to planning as in these examples:

"I usually write down the story or finger play--nothing detailed."

"I don't need them. I make monthly lesson plans with games and books. By the time I sit down in group, I know what I'm going to do. I have the plans in my head."

"Made plans the first couple of years I taught, but don't need them now."

"I pull cards from my card file with the songs, finger-plays, or whatever I am going to do."

Three teachers who reported they did written plans said the plans were fairly detailed.

In summary, written plans reported by the teachers we interviewed ranged from detailed to non-existent.

Analysis of plans we were able to look at or secure led to the conclusion that even when plans for the day were written, plans for group time can best be characterized as "sketchy to non-existent."

Observers of the actual conduct of group time were instructed to look for evidence of advance planning. Teachers were not asked about their advance plans. They did, however, know in advance the exact date and time of the observations.

In all but one classroom evidence of planning was indirect. That is, we saw no plans posted or laid out on a nearby table; no index cards with resource materials; no activity books with a suggested order marked; or other traditional guides. In the one classroom that had current plans posted, the book the teacher read to the children was not the one written on the plans.

There was, however, indirect evidence of type and quality of advance planning, as summarized below:

1. Books to be read were out on the table beside the teacher; children had an established procedure for forming a circle. Plans posted on the bulletin board were for the previous week; none for the current week.

2. Pictures the children were to discuss were brought to the circle. Directions for dismissal to the next activity ended the group time.

3. All materials were out and ready--(record, pointer); children were prepared with previously assigned show and tell items on a specified topic; teacher mentioned to the group that she had a new finger play on the plans, but they had run out of time. Other indirect evidence of advance planning was the theme discussion with individual children as they came to group time, the smooth flow of one activity to another, and the organized dismissal.

4. The book to be used was readily available and brought to the group time, but did not relate to theme or the book listed on the posted plans.

5. Book read to the group was selected from those the children were looking at just prior to group time. While children listened to one record, the teacher sorted through the nearby record rack to find a second. No plans were visible.

Activities That Precede and Follow Group Time

Any particular activity segment is influenced by the activity that immediately precedes and follows it. For example, whatever activity follows active outdoor play must provide for a physical and psychological "cool down" period. Whatever activity has to compete with the smells and sounds of lunch about to be served is working at a disadvantage, to say the least.

To determine the "sequence context" of group time, teachers were asked what activities preceded and followed their congregated meetings. No prevailing pattern emerged, although assigned or free choice interest centers were most frequently mentioned as both preceding and following group time (Tables 12 and 13). The combination of interest centers, outdoor or indoor motor activities, and dismissal to go home, which together account for 64% of the responses about what follows group time (Table 13) may indicate teacher sensitivity to children's need for a type of activity different from a teacher-directed group.

Activities that preceded or followed group time were also noted by the classroom observers. Activities preceding group time included:

1. "Clean-up" (three classrooms). In two classrooms this was clean-up after snack. In the other classrooms, children looked at books individually as a transition into group time.

2. Arrival at school.

3. Arrival at school and a short period of play at interest and activity centers while the teacher talked with parents and parent-helper.

Activities following group time included free choice of center and small group activities (three classrooms, assigned center activities (one classroom), and art activity for the total group (one classroom).

Table 12

Activities That Usually Precede Group Time

(All Group Times Combined)

Activity	Frequency	Percent
Assigned or Free Choice Interest Centers	15	22
Large Motor Activities - Outside or Inside	13	19
Arrival	10	15
Clean-up	10	15
Other Music Time-1, Bathroom 1, Group Inst., 1, Special, 1 Movement from Music Room, 1 Rest Time, 1	8	12
	68	101% [a]

[a]Percent does not total 100 because of rounding.

Table 13

Activities That Follow Group Time

(All Group Times Combined)

Activity	Frequency	Percent
Assigned or Free Choice Interest Centers	24	36
Large Motor Activities - Outside or Inside	13	20
Lunch/Snack	8	12
Dismissal to go home	5	8
Music	3	4
Other - Bathroom, Rest, Meditation, Group games, Art, Clean-up, Specials, Movement to another area	13	20
	66	100%

Although congruence between reported and observed activities was not complete, observed activity did not conflict with what was reported.

Activities in Group Time

Teachers were asked what activities they usually did in group time. The 261 separate responses were coded into 14 separate categories (Table 14).

Two categories--books and stories; music, songs, and music-related activities--clearly dominated, together accounting for 30% of the responses. They were closely followed by the categories of exercise, including movement and dance; and fingerplays, which accounted for an additional 10% each. These four categories accounted for over half the responses. However, out of this broad and rich array of possible group time activities, only three people (1%), mentioned poetry and nursery rhymes. Only one person mentioned relaxation activities.

Teachers were also asked what activities "went well" in group time. There were less than half as many responses to this question, indicating that teachers could discriminate between what might be possible and what would actually work. Their responses were coded into the same 14 categories (Table 15). Books and stories; music, songs and music-related activities; fingerplays; and exercise, including movement and dance were again most frequently mentioned.

Table 14

Activities Usually Done in Group Time

Activity	Number of Responses[a]	Percent of Responses
Books and Stories	39	15
Music, Songs, and Music-related activities	38	15
Execrise, including Movement and Dance	27	10
Fingerplays	26	10
Discussion	23	9
Sharing, Show and Tell	21	8
Lessons and Demonstrations	19	7
Traditional Opening Activities (calendar, roll, weather)	18	7
Planning and Review	16	6
Dramatization	13	5
Games	7	3
Films, Filmstrips, Slides	4	1
Poetry, Nursery Rhymes	3	1
Other: Relaxation, Person-of-the-Week; Newstime, etc.	7	3
	261	100%

[a]Teachers could give more than one response.

Table 15

Activities That Go Well in Group Time

Activity	Number of Responses[a]	Percent of Responses[b]
Books and Stories	22	18
Music, Songs, and Music-Related Activities	22	18
Fingerplays	19	16
Exercise, including Movement and Dance	12	10
Lessons and Demonstrations	9	7
Discussion	7	6
Dramatizations	5	4
Games	5	4
Sharing, Show and Tell	5	4
Traditional Opening Activities	4	3
Poetry, Nursery Rhymes	3	2
Films, Filmstrips, and Slides	2	2
Planning and Review	1	1
Other	5	4
	121	99%

[a]Teachers could give more than one response. [b]Percent does not total 100 because of rounding.

There are some interesting differences in frequencies between the two tables. Sharing and show and tell, mentioned 21 times as a possible activity, was mentioned only five times as something that "goes well." Traditional opening activities (calendar, weather, roll), mentioned 18 times a possible activity, drops to four in the list of things that "go well." Planning and review goes from 16 to 1.

Teachers were asked why specific activities or approaches succeeded in group time. Almost three-fourths replied with some variation of the idea that successful activities matched children's interests and needs, primarily through calling for active physical and mental involvement (Table 16).

In-class observation revealed a pattern of activities different from either of the reported ones. Out of a total of 48 observational checks in five classrooms (see Methods section for details), reading books and sharing/show and tell were observed in well over half (56%) of the checks. Few instances of music and movement were observed, and no finger plays and action rhymes (Table 17).

To show the same information in a different way:

In the group times observed, teachers read a book to children in 3 of 5 group times; had sharing/show and tell in 3 of 5 group times; had traditional opening exercises 2 of 5 group times; had activity records and songs in 2 of 5 group times; conducted discussion in 2 of 5 group times;

Table 16

Reasons Specific Activities or Approaches Succeed in Group Time

Reason			Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Children's Interests & Needs are Met			46	74%
Breakdown of Specific Reasons - # - %				
Activities call for Active Physical and Mental Involvement	23	37%		
Activities Come from Real Interests of the Children	5	8		
Activities Don't Require Children to Sit Too Long	4	6		
Other Child-Related Interests and Needs	14	23		
	46	74%		
Activities or Approaches Generate Interest, Attention, and Enjoyment			8	13
Teachers' Abilities to Conduct and Enjoy These Activities			7	11
External Conditions (Promise of Reward)			1	2
			62	100%

Table 17

Group Time Activities Observed

(Five Centers, 48 Observation Instances)

Activity	Number	Percent
Teacher Reads Book to Children	16	33%
Show and Tell/Sharing	11	23
Opening Activities (roll, calendar, count children)	6	13
Discussion	4	8
Records (songs and activity)	4	8
Dismissal transition	3	6
Singing Led by Teacher	1	2
Other (teacher talks to mother or aide; all recite alphabet)	3	6
	48	99% [a]

[a]Percent does not toal 100 because of rounding.

had a clear dismissal transition in 2 of 5 group times; talked with mother or aide in 2 of 5 group times; recited the alphabet in 2 of 5 group times.

Music, movement, and fingerplays were all mentioned frequently as activities done and activities that go well. Yet only one teacher led the children in singing a song; other music and movement activities were done with records, and then in only three classrooms. Sharing/show and tell was mentioned by only five of 35 teachers as something that "went well" during group time, but was second most frequently observed.

The wide range of activities that teachers listed as being done in group time (Table 14) stands in sharp contrast to the narrow range of activities actually done (Table 17). Even given the limited number of observations, one might have expected to see greater variety and diversity, given the range of the children and teachers who seemed to have clear ideas about what children liked in group time and why.

Order and Sequence of Activities Within Group Time

The order or sequence of events within a given activity segment is a variable easily controlled by teachers and held to be relevant in other instructional activities. For example, vigorous physical exercise requires both physical and psychological warm-up and cool-down. Suggestions for developing and conducting a lesson usually include a

definite sequence to provide motivation, help children organize material in their minds, follow directions, and apply the information. We were interested in finding out if teachers used a consistent sequence in group time, what that sequence was, and why they used it.

Twenty-three (23) of the 35 teachers interviewed said they had an order to the group time activities; 12 did not.

Five of the latter said they liked to vary the order; three others who said they had no particular sequence did use finger plays, a song, or something to get the children together and calmed down.

Analysis of the order people said they used revealed:

1. No consistent identifiable order across teachers or classrooms.

2. The group time activity that was most often sequentially planned was traditional opening activities. These consisted of some combination of a greeting, roll, calendar, weather, announcements, appointing leaders, saying the pledge of allegiance or a prayer, planning for the day, counting the children, and so forth. Teachers who had these activities usually did them in a definite sequence, although that sequence varied from classroom to classroom. Such activities were not limited to kindergartens, but were reported by teachers of three and four year-old children in all types of settings.

3. Recognition of certain sequences based on instructional or functional need. For example, some kind of activity to gather the children for the group time, such as songs and finger plays, was most often mentioned as being first in any sequence. A short group time at the end of the day might recap and review the day's activities, before a goodbye song for dismissal. A discussion based on a story would follow the story; introduction of the day's activities would precede planning. A teacher might plan to sustain the quiet mood of the activity just preceding group time, and sing songs at the end to get children livened up for outdoor play.

Teachers' reasons for having an order or sequence within group time were in three broad categories (Table 18):

1. To provide consistency and routine for both teachers and children.

2. To provide variation in the type of activity within group time.

3. To fulfill a functional need; that is, an activity serves a specific function within the sequence, such as gathering the children together at the beginning or dismissing them at the end.

Observation of actual group times revealed:

1. The one classroom where opening activities made up the group time clearly had a definite sequence to the activities,

Table 18

Reasons Given for an Order or Sequence of Activities in Group Time

Reason			Frequency	Percent
Consistency and Routine			16	40%
	Number	Percent		
For Children	13	33%		
For Teachers	3	7		
	16	40		
To Provide Variation in the Type of Activity Within Group Time			13	32
Functional Reasons - An Activity Serves a Specific Function Within the Sequence			11	28
	Number	Percent		
At the end	5	13%		
Within the sequence	4	10		
At the beginning	2	5		
	11	28		
			40	100%

known by teacher and children alike and implemented purposefully and briskly.

2. Two classrooms had activities that were easily identified as "openers" to gather the children.

3. There was little other consistent discernable sequence, although there were some instances of a logical instructional sequence, such as an introduction and discussion about the theme of the book to be read, followed by the reading, or a functional sequence, such as singing a song to bring the group back together after show and tell and before dismissal.

Decision-Making about Group Time

To determine what factors or processes teachers use in making decisions about group time, we asked an open question "How do you decide what you are going to do?" Teachers gave a total of 87 responses, which were coded into two major categories and ten sub-categories, attesting to the complexity and highly individual nature of decision-making and planning in teaching (Tables 19 and 20). Teachers clearly saw themselves as child-oriented, as children and daily events were most frequently mentioned as the source of ideas; second most frequently listed as a factor influencing decisions. The other frequently mentioned influence was the theme or concept being emphasized. Other factors and sources were mentioned far less often. Abstract guiding principles such as the need for a balance

Table 19

Factors Influencing Decisions About Group Time

Factor	Frequency	Percent
Theme or Concept Being Emphasized	21	45%
Children's Needs and Preferences	12	26
Need for a Balance of Continuity and Variety	7	15
Dynamics of the Group or Day	3	6
Other: Things teacher enjoys; quality of songs and stories; things that are important for children to know; evaluation of past activities	4	8
	47	100%

Table 20

Source of Ideas and Decisions About Group Time

Source	Frequency	Percent
Children and Daily Events	14	35
Books and Resource Files	9	23
Other Teachers	8	20
External Requirements (mandated kits; director decisions	5	12
Education and Experience	4	10
	40	100%

of continuity and variety; evaluation of past activities, the quality of the songs and stories, and whether or not what is being taught is important for the children to know were mentioned only ten times. The "theme" and the children guide decision-making.

Teachers' Problems and Concerns About Group Time

Twenty-nine teachers identified 120 specific problems and concerns about group time, which were coded into those relating to children, those relating to teachers, and those relating to external requirements or conditions (Table 20). Six teachers reported no problems.

Problems relating to children's behavior constituted 82% of the responses. One teacher spoke for many when she said "I can't get past 'two little pumpkins.'" Teachers reported an amazing variety of things that children do in group time to disturb, distract, or create diversions. These included simply getting up and walking away, talking among themselves, playing with toys or their clothing, rolling on the floor, punching or kicking a neighbor, or the newest contribution of modern technology: The ripping sound as velcro closures on shoes are opened and closed.

As has been noted by psychologists, teachers are not as concerned over behavior indicating non-participation. Only six of the 99 responses about children were concerned with the child who just "sits there", "won't look up",

"looks at the floor", or "bites nails."

Most (three-fourths) of the reasons for these problems were identified by the teachers as stemming from conditions beyond their control, such as children's developmental levels and needs; individual children's problems; external requirements and conditions; home background and conditions; or characteristics of the group (Table 21). Only a fourth of the reasons referred to conditions within the control of the teacher, such as inappropriate or insufficient resources; adult personnel problems, or the fact that the teacher was in the process of teaching expected group time behavior.

Clearly, in most instances, teachers hold children responsible for problems that arise in group time. They do not see themselves or environmental factors (place and time group time is held; materials, activities, or sequence used) as variables that can be altered to help make group time better. The few who did mentioned that the teacher "gets stale", "doesn't know enough resources", or "doesn't know what to do."

Teachers' Perceptions of What Might Help

One of the purposes of the study was to determine what might help teachers conduct better and more effective group times. Only one teacher said no help was needed.

Table 21

Reasons for Identified Problems and Concerns

Conditions Beyond Control of Teacher		Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
		66	74%

Specific Breakdown		#	%
Children's Developmental Levels and Needs		21	24%
Age/Developmental Level Characteristics	(10)		
Need for Social Interaction and Attention	(7)		
Short Attention Span	(4)		
Individual Child Problems (learning disability; emotional disturbance; disruptive behavior, etc.		18	20
External Requirements or Conditions (wide age span, group too large, director decides what shall be done, interruptions)		11	12
Home Background and Conditions		10	11
Characteristics of the Group (diversity; dynamics of the day; weather effects on group, etc.)		6	7
		66	74

Conditions Within Control of Teacher		23	26%

Specific Breakdown		#	%
Resources or Activities Inappropriate or Insufficient		12	13
Adult Personnel Problems (aide, other staff, self)		6	7
Children Still Learning Expected Group Time Behavior		5	6
		23	26

Table 22

Teachers' Problems and Concerns About Group Time

Problems and Concerns			Number of Responses	Percent of Responses
Relating to Children			99	82%
Specific Breakdown	#	%		
Child Behavior that Disturbs or Disrupts	77	64		
Child Behavior that Indicates Non-participation	6	5		
Balancing the Needs of Individual Children with Those of the Group	16	13		
	99	82		
Relating to Teachers			13	11
Specific Breakdown	#	%		
Teacher Unable to Get and Hold Children's Attention	6	5		
Teacher's Personal or Professional Inadequacies	7	5		
	13	19		
Relating to External Requirements or Conditions (Too many children; mandated activities or times; untrained classroom help)			8	7
			120	100

Specific requests for help were coded into three categories (Table 23):

(a) Resources and activities

(b) Methods and organization

(c) External conditions and needs

These responses indicate many areas where preservice and inservice planners and instructional supervisors can help teachers.

Information Specific to Classroom Observations

The actual conduct of group time in five classrooms was observed to obtain information not available through teacher report (see Methods section). Results that parallel interview results were reported earlier. This section reports findings specific to the classroom observations.

Observation was done in a cooperative preschool, a college child development center preschool, an all-day child care center with 5 year-old children, and a kindergarten. Classroom composition, group time composition, and group time length and time are shown in Table 24. The number of adults present varied. In these classrooms, class size and adult:child ratio were clearly conducive to positive adult:child and child:child interactions.

In four out of the five classrooms, children sat in a "clump" on the floor. In two of these cases they began in a circle but gradually edged closer to the teacher and

Table 23

Type of Help Requested by Teachers

Help Requested			Frequency	Percent
Resources and Activities	Frequency	%	37	53
New & appropriate Things to Do in Group Time (songs, fingerplays, movement, active participation	19	27		
Topical Resource File/Bibliography	4	5		
Music Resources - records, rhythms, how to use rhythm band instruments	4	6		
Story Resources - Bibliography, Ways to Vary, puppets	3	4		
Better Opening Activities, indluding Show and Tell	3	4		
Other - Attention getters; Outside guests; Simplified ideas for 3's; Resources to Lead Children to Higher Levels of Thinking	4	6		
	31	53%		
Methods and Organization	Frequency	%	24	34
Classroom & Behavior Management	6	9		
Organizing & Managing - covering material, organizing resources	4	6		
Help with Specific Problems - get children to come to group time; sustain group interest; make active movement activities go well; what to do when things go wrong	4	6		

(Table 23 Continued)

Table 23 (Continued)

Type of Help Requested by Teachers

Help Requested			Frequency	Percent
Methods and Organization	Frequency	%		
Ways to meet Child & Group Needs - wide age span; handicapped child; general needs;	3	4		
Workshop/Seminars on anything related to group time	3	4		
How to present new materials, concepts, centers in ways children can understand	2	2.5		
Other: More skill in all aspects; analysis of why you do something	2	2.5		
	24	34		
External Conditions and Needs	Frequency	%	9	12
Aides/assistants/other personnel taught appropriate behavior and skills	4	6		
Time to plan and prepare	2	3		
Fewer children	1	1		
Aide to sit in group	1	1		
Outside observer to "see what I don't see."	1	1		
	9	12		
			70	100%

Table 24

Classroom and Group Time Composition, Group Time Length and Time in Observed Classrooms

Classroom	1	2	3	4	5
Time of Group Time	9:17-9:42	9:30-9:52	12:46-1:02	9:05-9:36	10:40-10:53
Length of Group Time in minutes	25	22	16	31	13
Children in Class	13	16	11	21	10
Adults in Class	3, 4	2	2	3	2, 3
Children in Group Time	13	16	11	21	8, 10
Adults in Group Time	2, 4	1, 2	2	2	2
Children not participating	0	0	0	0	2, 0

each other. In one case the children sat in prearranged chairs. In only one instance did the teacher move among or in front of the group during group time. In only one instance did the teacher sit on the floor with the children.

Transitions Into and Out of Group Time. Unless handled smoothly, classroom transitions can become disruptive and a major time waster. Transitions into and out of group time are no exception. If anything, they may be more difficult than other transitions because, by definition, all the children are involved.

Positive conditions descriptive of the transition into and out of group time were derived from the literature and the investigator's experience, and incorporated into the observation schedule. The two observers made a judgment about which description best applied to what they were seeing. If differences of opinion existed, a resolution was reached by discussing the specific actions observed. Observation of transition into group time yielded the following results:

Description	Frequency (out of five possible)
Orderly, efficient	1
Disorderly	3
Clear signal given	4
Teacher waits for all children	2
Starts activity when children have gathered	2
Has open-ended starting activity	1

Comments on the transition add further insight into strengths and needs during transitions.

Children knew the "lights out" signal and most came to the group time location quickly. They sprawled and rolled on the floor until the teacher came, then quickly stood for the opening activity. Aides finished clean-up and brought the remaining children.

There was mass movement from snack to group time when the teacher pointed and said "Everybody on the rug." Teacher left to go get a couple of stray children, then got everyone seated.

After children were in a circle ready to listen, the teacher got distracted by mother-helper; left circle to check on something else; "lost" group, but quickly regained attention when she returned.

As children came into the room after arrival, they sat in prearranged chairs and joined in the on-going open-ended group activity.

Transition out of group time was observed in the same fashion, with the following results:

Description	Frequency (out of five classrooms)
Clear signal concluding	1
Dismissed all children at once	2
Dismissed children in groups	2
Dismissed children one at a time	0
Used procedures that got children to next activity	2
No clear concluding signal or transition	4

Recorded events elaborate on what actually happened. Teacher was not sure which aide was to be in charge of which activities following group time. Because of this, she focused her attention on the aide and lost the children's attention.

Teacher announced that all the children are to go to art. As they stood to leave, teacher realized that some children had switched shoes; much confusion resulted as they got shoes switched back.

Lowered voice to a whisper, had children "Get close for a secret", and quickly moved all children to the art area to explain the next activity. Used this movement as transition.

Children are sent to the next activity one pre-designated group at a time.

Told children to go to the next activity, but in order to do this had to round them up from various parts of the room, where they had run during the activity record.

Four out of the five teachers observed did not follow procedures indicative of current best thinking regarding transitions.

Child Guidance and Management. Observers also checked on ways teachers monitored and maintained children's attention and dealt with children's inattention and misbehavior. Observers alternated one minute observations of this aspect of group time with one minute observations of the activity underway and behavior of the children. The child guidance and management aspects of group time were systematically checked 48 times in the five centers. Thus, it would have been possible to observe a given behavior 48 times. Teachers could demonstrate more than one behavior in a given observation scan. The reader should also remember that observers checked for child guidance and management less than half the time they were in the classroom. Thus, any given behavior could have occurred at a time when observers were focusing on something else.

Some behavior is less effective than other in maintaining children's attention: For example, when a teacher is focusing on material or on one child, awareness

of what the total group is doing is likely to drop. Scanning the group, maintaining eye contact, circulating among the group, and a lively and varied pace and presentation are likely to help children pay attention. As shown in Table 25, teachers could increase their use of these more effective techniques and decrease their focus on materials or only part of the group.

Teachers dealt with inattention and misbehavior primarily by ignoring it. They seldom scolded children, but reinforced for desired behavior even less often.

In fact, one classroom contributed 3 of the 4 instances of reinforcement of desired behavior. Clearly, teachers could use a wider variety of techniques both for monitoring and maintaining children's attention and for dealing with inattention (Table 26).

Less easy to quantify, but readily apparent was that the teachers were gentle, genuinely interested in and friendly and supportive of the children. They were patient--perhaps "too patient"--with behavior indicative of children's lack of attention and focus on what was going on. They smiled, laughed, and seemed to enjoy being with the children, even when the children were not doing what they were supposed to.

Table 25

Teacher Behavior Related to Monitoring and Maintaining Children's Attention

Behavior	No. [a]	Percent of No. of Behaviors Observed	Percent of Times Behavior Could Have Been Observed
Focuses on Material	23.5	25	49
Focuses on One Child or Group	22.5	24	47
Changes Pace and Presentation	17	18	25
Maintains Eye Contact With Group	14.5	16	30
Scans Group	14	15	29
Circulates Among Group	1	1	2
Focuses on Other Adults	1	1	2
	92.5	100%	

[a] Decimals result from averaging two observers' findings.

Table 26

Teacher Methods of Dealing With Inattention and Misbehavior

Method	Frequency[a]	% of No. of Behaviors Observed	% of Times Behavior Could Have Been Observed
Ignores minor inattention and misbehavior	40	38	83
Prevents potential problems (maintains momentum, seats children according to plan)	28	26	58
Reminds children of appropriate behavior	12	11	25
Admonishes, scolds, reprimands children	7	7	15
Tends to problem situations early	6.5	6	14
Lets misbehavior disrupt group time	6	6	13
Reinforces desired behavior	4.5	4	9
Eliminates disruptive behavior quickly	2	2	4

[a]Decimals result from averaging two observers' findings.

Adult and Child Activities and Interactions in Group Time

During observation of group time, observers checked adult and child presence and behavior alternatively with child guidance techniques, checking each for a one minute interval throughout the group time. Observers noted the activity (book, roll, show and tell), what the teacher and other adults were doing, and whether the children were disruptive, inattentive or non-participating. Children not disruptive or inattentive were assumed to be appropriately attending and participating. Operational definitions of these categories can be found in the Methods section.

Information was collected from five classrooms; five lead teachers; eight to ten aides or assistants; sixty-six to seventy-one children, for 1.8 hours or 107 minutes of group time. The number of children and assisting adults varied, as some joined the group after activities began or left for various reasons.

Information on what assistants did is not presented in the tables because they usually sat in the group listening and participating with the children. Aides in three groups cleaned up or prepared materials for the next activity before joining the group time. In eight instances, aides sitting in the group became a distraction in and of themselves. They became the focal point of nearby children's attention. They did such things as

hold children on their laps; cuddle children against their sides, with the result that some children leaned against the aides and sucked their thumbs; talked with the children while the teacher was talking or reading; "shushed" children; let children play with their hair, jewelry, and clothing; or talked with the teacher. Such behavior encouraged children's inattention and non-participation.

Observers saw little overt disruptive behavior. Only nineteen instances were recorded; fifteen of them in one classroom where an inexperienced teacher was being outclassed by the children's ingenuity in creating excitement. There were no instances of individual children "out-of-control", such as fighting, kicking, spitting, screaming, defiantly refusing to cooperate, or running wildly. In the interviews, teachers mentioned "disruptive, emotionally disturbed children", and doubtless there are some, but not among the 71 children we observed during the group times.

What was apparent and substantiated by data was much inattention and non-participation by children during group time. Determining a child's attention or inattention; participation or non-participation is difficult, at best. How does one categorize a child who is not participating but is watching others? Who is looking at his or her "show and tell" object while waiting a turn? Who is sitting quietly gazing into space during a group discussion?

Such inscrutable behavior we considered "appropriate", coding as inattentive or non-participating only behavior such as talking with other children or adults, unfastening shoes, turning away from the focus of the activity, bothering other children, and so forth.

The rate of attention in the five classrooms observed ranged from 50% to 88%, with a mean of 72%. That is, over all the children in all the observations in all the classrooms, 72% were appropriately attending and participating; 28% were not.

Overall Attention Rate by Classroom

Classroom 1	73%
Classroom 2	74%
Classroom 3	88%
Classroom 4	76%
Classroom 5	50%

Attention rate (percentage of children attending, as determined by observation) computed according to activities done in group times had a much narrower range, from 65%, during sharing/show and tell, to 78% during a discussion with Halloween pictures of the children as a focal point.

Overall Attention Rate by Activity

Discussion of a high interest activity with a visual focal point	78%
Musical activities	77%
Teacher reads book to children	72%
Opening activities	69%
Sharing/Show and Tell	65%
Dismissal transition and "Other" omitted because of small sample size.	

There are differences in attention rate among classrooms; differences in attention rate related to the activity which is in progress. The sample size is too small to make any but the most tentative suggestions about influences. Certainly both the teacher and the activity are important, as well as other variables.

What makes the difference in children's participation and involvement in group time? Information from observation suggests several factors:

1. The teacher and the teacher's ability to plan, organize, and implement a group time appropriate to the children;

2. the selection of activities;

3. some variety in activities;

4. orderly transitions into and out of group time;

5. use of several means of monitoring and guiding children's behavior, as ignoring inattention does not seem to be sufficient;

6. realistic expectations about young children's abilities to hold the attention of other children in the group, as in show and tell and sharing;

7. environmental factors (placement of children; relationship of the teacher to the group as indicated by furniture and space arrangement; interruptions);

8. age and developmentally appropriate expectations for children.

Much further study and careful analysis of classroom and group time processes will be necessary before any definitive statements can be made.

Conclusions and Recommendations

All the preprimary centers and schools in this study had a group time or circle time. Such universality in our small but diverse sample leads to the conclusion that group time is a scheduled activity in most early childhood centers. As with many individual activity segments in early childhood classrooms, what the children are learning about their roles and relationships in a school or center is as important as the actual song, story, or finger play. Children are learning patterns of attention or inattention, participation or non-participation, and "tuning-in" or "tuning-out." These patterns involve important task, interpersonal, and group functioning competencies, such as knowing when to listen and when to talk, how to identify and attend to the person or material that is the focus, ignore the distraction and respect the rights of other people present, participate in an appropriate way, and enjoy and learn from what the group is doing. Yet for many teachers and children, group time is not the enjoyable, rewarding experience it should be.

Teachers were gentle, warm, and kind; open about their problems and concerns; sincerely wanting to do a good job with the children. They were clearly child-oriented in their thinking and planning. However, many teachers did not perceive themselves as active and

powerful leaders in group time events. When things went wrong, they identified the cause as the children, the home, or external conditions beyond their control. When things went well, they gave credit to the activities or "a good group." Teachers' tendencies to ignore children's and other adult's inattention and inappropriate behavior strengthens this conclusion. Ignoring behavior can be a powerful guidance technique, but only when combined with other more active approaches that make clear what behavior is expected and rewarded.

Teachers are under-using the broad and rich variety of materials, activities, and techniques appropriate for group time. They identified a wide variety of resources, but used only a few. Also supporting this conclusion was the relative absence of poetry, nursery rhymes, audiovisual materials, and relaxation activities, either in interviews or observation. Teachers also underused the large number of techniques available for monitoring and guiding children's behavior. Educators and psychologists have identified and in some cases tested many effective guidance procedures. With a few exceptions, the teachers we observed either did not know them or had not developed the skill to put them into practice at the appropriate time.

Concern with the immediate dominated teachers' decisions about group time. Except in a few instances, written planning was not regarded as essential. Children's interests and activities, and the theme or content of the day or week were primary determinants of what teachers did. If long-range goals, organizational and instructional principles, theories of child guidance and development influence teachers' decisions about group time, most of them are not aware of it.

The "vertical similarity" that teachers reported in group time activities may cause both teachers and children problems if it continues. Traditional opening activities of the calendar, roll call, greetings, weather observations, and sharing/show and tell make a good example. It is questionable if these activities, even with some variations, can be equally appropriate for children three, four, five, and six. The age and development span is simply too great. Of equal importance is the effect on children's interest and attention of doing the same things in group time year after year. It makes no difference whether the teacher of younger children started the activity "too soon", or the teacher of older children carried it on after its purpose was accomplished. The end result for the child is likely to be the same: boredom, tedium, and inattention.

"Group time" or "circle time" in early childhood classrooms is an important activity segment that should be objectively evaluated and, where indicated, improved. No "sweeping reforms" are necessary because conditions for effective and satisfying learning in group time already exist in many classrooms. Joint efforts of the profession as a whole, teacher educators, administrators, and especially teachers can bring about needed improvement.

The early childhood profession should give serious consideration to the long range, deeper goals of classroom activities. What are the reasons we have the typical activities that make up a day in the life of teachers and children in early childhood centers--art, construction, play--or in this case, group or circle time? Certainly the experiences themselves are worthwhile, but we are still struggling for deeper meanings and understandings. Children are learning more in group time than any particular fingerplay, how to count the boys and girls, or follow directions given by a disembodied voice on a tape or record. Some good thinking about life-long attitudes, skills, and habits that should begin in early childhood has been done in the last few years (Copple, Sigel, & Saunders, 1979; Hohman, Banet, & Weikart, 1979; Kamii & DeVries, 1980; Mediax, 1981).

Such thinking can lend a longer-range perspective to activities and activity management in the classroom. It can put concern with the immediate, which dominated teachers' decision-making in this study, into a larger context. We need to continue such examination and involve teachers in evaluation of what they have children do, and why. As a profession, we must also address the issue of the downward extension of early childhood education for increasing numbers of children, and the similarity of what children are expected to do at each age or level, whether in mixed-age or age-grouped classrooms. Individual teachers cannot be expected to solve the problem of "vertical similarity" alone.

Teacher educators need to give prospective and practicing teachers direct instruction and practice in planning and organizing for a successful group time, as well as other activity segments. Teachers "know" the types of materials that are available and appropriate, but actually use only a limited number. Teachers may need direct instruction and practice in maintaining children's attention, and monitoring and guiding their behavior in group time, including transitions at the beginning and end. They need to know and apply to practical situations such as group time the basic principles of organizing for instruction and guiding children's behavior. What teachers

learn in discrete courses, training sessions, or workshops must become integrated, so that they use what they learn to plan and implement effective daily activities.

Administrators can help teachers' efforts to have more effective and enjoyable group times. Change takes both time and courage, whether that means more planning, locating new materials, developing new techniques of management, or working with assistance to upgrade their skills. Administrators can support teachers' efforts by providing time for planning, expecting that planning will be done, and arranging inservice training in areas of need.

As teachers, we need to realize our responsibility and potential as vital forces in the lives of children. We can and should plan activities that are not only responsive to children's needs and interests, but also introduce new ideas, teach new skills, develop positive attitudes and behavior in group time. We need to expand our repertoire of materials and activities, and enlarge our techniques of monitoring and guiding children's behavior. We need to coach other adults in the classroom on how to behave in group time. In short, we need to assume the active classroom leadership role that the title "teacher" confers.

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1-4 ☐☐☐☐

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

"STRUCTURED INTERVIEW"

I. Instructions to Interviewer:

1. Introduce yourself.
2. Explain the project.
3. Assure that they will not be identified in any way, even though you will be making notes to help you remember, if they don't mind.
4. Take time to establish rapport.

II. Interview

A. FOCUSED QUESTIONS:

A-1. Do you have a time during the day when all or most of the children in your class gather together for songs, fingerplays, stories, sharing, planning, or other activities under the direction of the teacher?

5
- 1 ☐ Yes (GO ON TO QUESTION A-2)
- 2 ☐ No →

A-1a. If not, please explain the reasons why you do not.

(6-7)

GO TO SECTION C. "BACKGROUND"

A-2. What do you usually call this "time"? (Check one)

8
- 1 ☐ Circle time
- 2 ☐ Group time
- 3 ☐ Rug time
- 4 ☐ Group meeting time
- 5 ☐ Opening exercises
- 6 ☐ Other (specify) _____

_____

A-3. How many times a day do you gather together?

(9-10) _____

A-4. What times during the day do you usually do this? (Check all that apply) How long (minutes) does this (use what they call it) usually last? (Fill in next to the meeting time.)

Time of Day	Length in Minutes
11- ☐ 7 - 8 a.m.	21- _____
12- ☐ 8 - 9	22- _____
13- ☐ 9 - 10	23- _____
14- ☐ 10 - 11	24- _____
15- ☐ 11 - 12	25- _____
16- ☐ 12 - 1	26- _____
17- ☐ 1 - 2	27- _____
18- ☐ 2 - 3	28- _____
19- ☐ 3 - 4	29- _____
20- ☐ 4 - 5	30- _____

A-5. What usually comes just before? (Open ended)

(31-32)

A-6. What usually comes just after? (Open ended)

(33-34)

A-7. Describe the activities that usually take place. (Open Ended)

(35-36)

A-8. Do you do these activities in any particular order? For example, do you usually have a story first, then some fingerplays? Or perhaps some songs first, then group discussion.

(37) ☐ 1 YES
☐ 2 NO

A-9a. If Yes, ask them to explain their reasons for the order they use. (Open ended)

(38-39)

A-9. How do you decide what you are going to do? (Open ended)

(40-41)

A-10. Do you have any written plans or examples that you could share with us? (Open ended)

(42-43)

B. STRENGTHS/NEEDS:

B-1. We are trying to find out what problems and concerns early childhood teachers have about the _____ (use name they used for group meeting time) either with children's behavior, selecting activities, or anything else. Would you please share any that you have?

It will help if you can be as specific as possible. (Open ended)

INTERVIEWER: If there is no response, help them get started by saying, "For example, do the children always pay attention the way you want them to? Do you ever have any problems during the (time they are coming to group time?) Do they ever bother each other, or get restless?

(44-46)

B-2. What do you think are some of the reasons for these problems? (Open ended)

(49-49)

B-3. What parts of the _____ seem to go well? (Open ended)
(group meeting time)

(49-50)

B-4. Why? (Open ended)

(51-52)

B-5. If you could receive some help in learning how to have a better group time, what would you most like to have? (Open ended)

(53-54)

C. BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

C-1. Type of Center. (Check one)

55
- 1 ☐ Infant Care
- 2 ☐ Pre-School
- 3 ☐ Kindergarten
- 4 ☐ Full day care
- 5 ☐ Combination (specify) _____
- 6 ☐ Other (specify) _____

C-2. Sponsorship

56
- 1 ☐ Public school
- 2 ☐ Religious institution
- 3 ☐ Community agency
- 4 ☐ Proprietary (Private ownership)
- 5 ☐ Corporation
- 6 ☐ Other (specify) _____

C-3. Funding. (Check one)

57
1 ☐ Tax money
2 ☐ Tuition from parents
3 ☐ Contributions
4 ☐ Agency (Specify) _____
5 ☐ Combination (Specify) _____
6 ☐ Other (Specify) _____

C-4. Age range of children in this class.

(58,59) _____ to _____

C-5. Ratio of adults to children in this class.

(60) _____ Number of Adults

(61) _____ Number of Children

C-6. Educational background of teacher (highest completed).

62
1 ☐ High School
2 ☐ Some College, ECE or related
3 ☐ Come college, another area
4 ☐ Associate degree, ECE related
5 ☐ Bachelor's degree, ECE related
6 ☐ Bachelor's degree, another area
7 ☐ Master's degree, ECE related
8 ☐ Master's degree, another area
9 ☐ Other (specify) _____

C-7. Years of teaching experience.

(63-64) _____ ECE-related experience

(65-66) _____ Other teaching experience

Observer_____

Time of Observation: Beg._____ End_____

Place Observed_____

_____

_____

Time of Grp. Time: Beg._____End_____

Length in Minutes _____

Ages of children_____

Number of Children in Class/Group_____

Number of Adults in Class/Group_____

Number of Children Participating in Group Time_____

Number of Adults Participating in Group Time_____

Number of Children Not Participating in Group Time_____

Activity or activities that precede group time:

Transitional activities into group time: (list activities and describe events)

_____Orderly, efficientmovement of children from previous activities into group time

_____Disorderly, inefficient movement of children into group time

_____Gives clear signal that group time is starting

_____Waits for all children to be present and attending before beginning

_____Starts activity as soon as most of the children have gathered and are ready

_____Uses open-ended activity to help children come to group time

Other comments:

Describe any evidence of a written plan or other type of systematic approach to group time, such as teacher's plan book in evidence, notes on paper or card carried to group time, cards or props laid out in order, etc.

List the group time activities in order, and their length in minutes:

Transitional activities out of group time:

_____Clear signal group time is over

_____Dismisses all children at once

_____Dismisses children in groups

_____Dismisses children one at a time

_____Uses procedures that get children to the next activity

_____No signal or transition activities

Other comments:

Activity (ies) that follow group time:

O.M.

Copy or attach schedule of the day, if available.

84

Record here any pertinent comments or observations not provided for elsewhere.

Materials, ideas ready?
Children knew what to do?
Unclear, confusing directions?
Maintained momentum?

7,

Time began_____

Time ended_____

ADULT/CHILD ACTIVITIES AND INTERACTIONS

	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18
Activity/ Content									
Teacher: Presence/ Behavior									
Assistant: Presence/ Behavior									
Children: Presence/ Behavior									
Overt Disruption									
Inattentive or non-participating									
Appropriate attending/participating									
Other									

ADULT CODE

Leads
Talks to
Reads to
Guides (+ or-)
Listens
Waits
Participates
Manipulates material
Non-focal activity
(interruptions, disruptions, playing with child)

See attachment for further explanation

CHILD CODE

Overt Disruption--stops flow of group time;distracts teacher and other children; interrupts; hits; fights; doesn't conform to rules

Inattentive or non-participating--does not participate when that is called for; looks away from focus of activity; p plays with clothing or other objects; talks with other children;rolls on floor, etc.

Appropriate attending/participating--attends to activity focus; if not participating is watching; neither disruptive nor inattentive

	3	5	7	9	11	13	15	17
TEACHER METHODS FOR MONITORING/ MAINTAINING ATTENTION:								
Scans group								
Maintains eye contact w. group								
Focuses on one child or group								
Focuses on material								
Focuses on other adults								
Changes pace and presentation								
Circulates among group								
Other								
TEACHER METHODS OF DEALING WITH INATTENTION AND MISBEHAVIOR:								
Prevents potential problems (seats children; momentum)								
Reminds children of appropriate behavior								
Reinforces desired behavior								
Tends to problem situations early, in positive fashion)								
Attends to each misbehavior, regardless of seriousness)								
Ignores minor inattention/misbehavior								
Eliminates disruptive behavior quickly								
Lets misbehavior disrupt group time								
Admonishes, scolds, reprimands ch.								
Puts off or ignores quiet children								
Other								

NOTES